

Federal Funding Q&A

Why is the Catholic sector unhappy with the deal being offered by the Federal Government?

The Catholic sector is the second largest provider of education in Queensland and in Australia. The Federal Government did not involve us in any meaningful discussions prior to the announcement of the funding package. In fact, we were not given any information at all until after the announcement of the package by the Prime Minister and the Minister on 2 May.

The proposal from the Federal Government changes the basis for funding Catholic schools which currently educate 147,000 Queensland students in 302 schools. The Government says it has created a needs-based system but it has changed the way Catholic School Authorities are able to respond to need, based on our detailed knowledge and understanding of local contexts, without any consultation with the Catholic sector.

We are asking the Federal Government as a matter of urgency to sit down with us and discuss this proposal. So far we have very little detail that we can use to properly assess the impacts on our students and teachers.

But at the end of the day you are getting more money for education. Isn't that a good thing?

We appreciate that in the first instance we will receive an increase in funding in 2018 which will be in the order of 3.7 per cent overall. The issue is that this is a 10-year deal with no certainty of funding beyond the first few years.

What Catholic schools want is certainty going forward that we will be able to continue to sustainably deliver Catholic education to students from the diversity of cultural, social and economic groups we currently provide for all over Queensland from Thursday Island to the Gold Coast and out to Mt Isa and Quilpie.

The Greiner Report has criticised Catholic schools for the way they redistribute funds. How are funds distributed to Queensland Catholic schools?

The Greiner Report was prepared for the New South Wales Catholic Education Commission. It is not a public document and we have not seen the contents but whatever it says is specific to the New South Wales context.

The Federal Government recognises that the Catholic system in Queensland has better local knowledge than a Canberra bureaucrat to determine where funding is most needed and can be best used. That is why the Government allows us to redistribute funds within our sector.

We do redistribute funds to ensure that families in our regional and remote communities and our less well-off areas can still have access to Catholic education. Those funds go to Catholic schools in areas such as:

- Barcaldine, Blackall and Longreach

- Monto and Biloela
- Clermont
- Springsure
- Emerald
- New schools in developing areas

Is the process for redistributing funds transparent and public?

The total funding available to every Catholic school in Queensland is published on the My School website and has been for the last five years.

Our school communities understand that there are particular schools within our Catholic system that need and deserve our help to ensure that students continue to have access to a Catholic education.

Why should some Catholic schools be funded above their Schooling Resource Standard?

We accept the move to bring school funding for each school into line with the Schooling Resource Standard calculated for its particular circumstances. In fact, we've been transitioning towards that for some years now and we certainly think it can be achieved within the 10-year time frame set out by the Federal Government in this package.

Do you divert government education funding into any parish activities?

In Queensland it is illegal for funds provided for education to be used for any other purpose. Education funding must be applied to education and that is exactly what we do.

On top of the legal requirements we also have our own guidelines that ensure schools meet all their responsibilities as not-for-profit organisations when they make use of government funding.

How many of your schools pay rent to the local parish?

No Queensland Catholic schools pay rent to their local parish.

Will you look at closing schools as a result of this funding package?

We're not currently looking at closing any schools. What we want is the opportunity to sit down with the Federal Government and understand how this proposed funding scheme will work, what are the assumptions that have been built into it and how will that affect us.

We recognise that the Federal Government is providing a funding increase but we need to be certain that in a 10-year package our schools will be properly funded throughout that period. Right now we don't have that certainty.

What is creating the uncertainty?

The lack of detail provided by the Federal Government means we don't know what assumptions have been made in creating the proposal and calculating the level of funding to be allocated to Catholic schools.

The proposed system introduces a variable indexation model from 2021 so from year to year we won't know what level of funding increase we can expect to keep up with wages growth and CPI increases. The model also changes other elements that impact on the funding delivered to schools such as the way funding to students with a disability will be determined. It is possible that these changes could result in reductions in funding to Queensland Catholic schools. We have no way of knowing.

How much will school fees go up as a result of this announcement?

That's a question we simply can't answer because of the lack of detail the Federal Government has provided to us in announcing this package.

At this point we can't say what the impacts will be on individual schools and that's why we urgently need to sit down with the Federal Government and discuss this proposal before it is put to the Parliament.

The Government has excluded us from the negotiations around this package and we're still waiting for the details.

The Catholic sector says the removal of the System Weighted Average is problematic. Why?

The Catholic school sector operates as a system – the second biggest education system in the country – and we want to be treated as a system. In fact the original Gonski report recognised the value of treating our sector as a system.

The loss of the System Weighted Average ultimately means that we will have less money available to support schools with services like learning support, student protection services, improved governance structures and professional development for teachers.

We will lose our capacity to provide the extra support that we now give to the schools most in need.

What is the next move for Catholic schools?

We're ready and waiting to talk to the Federal Government about this package. The lack of consultation on this funding package has been remarkable. Let's sit down and have a mature conversation that gives us the detail we need to fully understand what the Government intends to achieve as a result of this proposed funding package.